DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 550 CE 005 095

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TITLE Continuing Education for Ministry--Perspectives and Prospects.
PUB DATE 16 Jun 75
NOTE 11p.; Address to the Annual Meeting of SACEM (8th, June 16, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Adult Education Programs; *Clergymen; Educational Change; *Educational Needs; *Professional Continuing Education; Religious Education; *Theological Education

ABSTRACT

The development of continuing education for ministry shows a need for more growth and change in seminary training to meet the fundamental needs of the clergy and the laity. Recent changes since 1960 have resulted in three developments: (1) the need for continuing education for ministry has been recognized; (2) the increasing number in the variety and distribution of continuing education resources that present predominantly a standard theological curriculum of biblical, historical, doctrinal, and pastoral concerns; and (3) the interaction between learning and practice has been recognized and the responsibility of the clergy-learner in the parish context has been identified as an essential ingredient in individual plans for continuing education. A problem exists in the lack of participation in continuing education programs among the clergy who need this form of organized programs of study. This problem comes as a result of the lack of resources for funding experiments and improvements in continuing education programs for ministry. Despite budgetary problems, development in research on continuing education in ministry has increased over the years. Future trends to meet the training needs of the clergy will show an increasing role for continuing education. (Author/EC)

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CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR MINISTRY - PERSPECTIVES AND PROSPECTS *

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Richmond, Virginia

My theme tonight is "Continuing Education for Ministry - Perspectives and Prospects." I will look with you at the past fifteen years, noting some contrasts and commenting on certain trends; and then I will venture some future projections.

At this eighth annual meeting of SACEM it may seem strange to look back across nearly twice that number of years, but I have chosen 1960 as a starting point for three reasons. First, the Library of Congress recognized continuing education for ministry in 1960, when it established the subject heading in its card catalog "Clergy - Post-ordination training." When the national library adopts a topic in its catalog, that date provides a reliable starting point for tracing progress.

For a second reason I have chosen 1960 as a starting point. It was in that year that the first national survey of continuing education for ministry was made, under auspices of the American Association of Theological Schools and the National Council of Churches. This published report furnished the earliest comprehensive data on programs across the United States.[1]

Thirdly, the seeds of SACEM were sown about 1960, as the first seminary and denominational staff persons were named to take responsibility for continuing education. Thus began a professional group who developed continuing education among religious leaders, even as continuing education was activated among other professional groups such as medicine, law, and public accounting. The Department of the Ministry in the National Council of Churches drew continuing educators into its regular meetings and sponsored annual gatherings that led to the formation of SACEM in 1967.[2]

In taking 1960 as our point of beginning, however, we are aware of antecedents. Important contributions to continuing education for ministry can be noted from the 19th century, such as the Chautauqua movement, YMCA and YWCA, training events for world missionaries, and the University of Chicago home study provisions dating from the 1890's. Early in the 20th century summer institutes were held in theological schools; the University of Wisconsin held its first town and country church conference in 1911; and the College of Preachers opened in Washington in 1929. Clinical pastoral education began in the 1930's to become one of the most formative influences on continuing education.[3]

So we are assembling this week as a relatively young organization yet with a history and a treasury of knowledge and experience built up across nearly a century of formal and informal adult education efforts. We acknowledge our debt to all those who have helped to shape the continuing education movement!

Now I want to look at the picture in 1975 and observe three contrasts with the situation of 1960. First, recognition of the need for continuing education for ministry. In 1960 Reuel Howe was calling church educators to realize the radical discontinuity between seminary education as then conducted and the parish minister's responsibility as trainer of the laity for their ministry in the world.[4] In an institute he started near Detroit in 1957 Reuel demonstrated across the next fifteen years to more than 5,000 clergy, laity, and seminary faculty how seminary education and continuing education may be linked to meet fundamental needs in ministry. Through the efforts of Reuel Howe, and others who have helped to focus attention on this complex problem, wide recognition is now being given the continuing education needs

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* an address at the 8th Annual Meeting of SACEM, 16 June 1975

of clergy and laity. Careful studies have been made among churchmen of certain cities, states, regions; of various age groups; of single and multiple denominations. They have made clear the various needs: knowledge, growth, training in skills, changed support systems, therapy. Whereas in 1960 these needs may have been intuitively felt and occasionally identified, now documented research has shown their variety and intensity along a broad spectrum of ministers.[5]

A second stark contrast appears between 1960 and 1975: the variety and distribution of continuing education resources. SACEM's five regional resource guides for 1975-76 show the many institutions and agencies now serving--seminaries, institutes, universities, colleges, conference centers, consulting groups, retreats, etc. During the past fifteen years hundreds of programs have been developed. Some are repeated regularly; others are occasional or tailor-made. Many educational institutions now are known as potential resources of learning for ministry, responsive to requests for programs even when they do not publicize courses of direct interest to churchmen.

What do these resources offer in continuing education? From the descriptions available to me I observe they present predominantly a standard theological curriculum of biblical, historical, doctrinal, and pastoral concerns--much the same subject matter as appeared in 1960 programs. In many instances, however, functional interests are uppermost in these learning events. Rather than academic pursuits, they focus on the practice of ministry. So, for example, the parables of Jesus are studied not as biblical antiquities but as preaching and teaching materials. Christian ethics is approached less as a body of theory and more as a means to situational problem-solving in community. Doctrine is examined not to observe its interior relations but to grasp its meaning for human existence. Worship is studied not for its ancient values but for its ability to bring people today into touch with transcendent realities.

Along with the numerically dominant theological content of current continuing education, however, there appear many programs that focus upon clergy as persons, and/or the institutions in which they serve. Thus numerous events deal with evaluation of professional performance[6] and role conflict[7] and others combine these with organizational development, goal setting, and management--aimed at the revitalization of the church.[8] Clergy are being offered help in dealing with their administrative function that Samuel Blizzard earlier identified as so problematic for pastors.[9]

A third contrast: note how the definition of continuing education has been broadened and sharpened in the period between 1960 and 1975.

1. Continuing education is a lifelong program of systematic, sustained study.

- Connolly Gamble (1960)

2. Continuing education is a life-long process of learning and growth. It takes seriously the personal and professional needs of persons, the world in which persons live, and the occupational setting (parish-community). It focuses upon the enrichment of ministry, the upgrading of skills, the re-evaluating of priorities, the raising of morale, liberation and creativity, self-actualization, identity, autonomy, integrity. It may be in a variety of settings: at home (reading, tapes, video, correspondence); in the parish ("conjoint learning" - pastor and people sharing, learning, deciding together); in the immediate area (cluster groups, nearby seminaries, universities, and centers); away (wherever a particular need is being addressed).

- James A. Sparks (1972)

3. Continuing education is learning after ordination and implies internal growth and external change. Programs extensive in scope and varied in method must aim at the total growth of the priest, spiritual, intellectual, emotional. In short, continuing education means growth of the whole man in many dimensions other than the strictly intellectual.

- National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1972)

4. Continuing education is an individual's personally designed learning program which begins when basic formal education ends and continues throughout a career and beyond. An unfolding process, it links together personal study and reflection and participation in organized group events.

- Mark A. Rouch (1974)

5. Continuing education is an individual's personally-designed learning program to improve vocational competencies, which begins when formal education ends and continues throughout one's career and beyond. An unfolding process, it links together personal study and reflection, and participation in organized group events in a related series of "more-or-less organized events."

- Southern Baptist Seminary Extension Commission (1974)

6. Continuing education is an individual's personally-designed learning program developed with the help of colleagues (laity and fellow-clergy) to improve vocational competencies, which begins when formal education ends and continues throughout one's career and beyond. An unfolding process, it links together personal study and reflection, and participation in organized group events in a related series of "more-or-less organized events."

- Connolly Gamble (1975)

7. Continuing education for ministry is a planned, on-going, systematic, supervised, and evaluated program of learning and growth, involving achievement of new or increased skills, enhancement of knowledge, and personal, or spiritual development. Such a program should enable clergy to accomplish both short- and long-range goals for their ministry.

- Episcopal Church Board for Theological Education (1975)

The interaction between learning and practice has been recognized. The responsibility of the clergy-learner in the parish-context has been identified as an essential ingredient in individual plans for continuing education. The participation of laity and other clergy in formulating plans has been emphasized. The varieties of forms have been affirmed. That the process is career-long has been stressed.

Thus from different sectors have come important new refinements of the process, born out of dialogue among teachers and learners engaged together in continuing education. And that refining process must continue!

Now I want to move from an examination of contrasts to make some observations of the current scene. First, I note that the ties between "consumers" and "producers" of continuing education range from strong to weak--mostly weak. The reasons for this are many and complex.

Mills and Hesser analyzed the first national survey of clergy continuing education drawn from responses of Protestant ministers themselves. They concluded:

"The chief unanswered question is the linkage between felt need and actual participation (in continuing education). Does stated need actually motivate behavior to meet that need or do the questionnaire responses reflect only idle wishes rather than genuine needs capable of moving men into learning activity?"[10] Their question is still not answered.

Two years ago a group of veteran continuing educators assessed the proportion of clergy in the U.S.A. who take part in organized programs of study. In their considered judgment, no more than 10% take part in one systematic study program each year (they may be labeled "self-starters"). Another 15-20% may participate in one event within a three-year span (the "slow-starters"). The remaining 70-75% take part even less frequently or not at all (the "seldom-starters" and the "never-starters"). Thus a part of the problem lies with the clergy who are the intended market for continuing education programs.

And a part of the responsibility rests upon the marketers, the educators offering the programs. Many are engrossed by other assignments and give only part time to continuing education duties. Their programs are sometimes poorly scheduled for parish clergy. Seldom does their funding allow for experiment and improvement across a series of trials. They may be offered in places expensive or inconvenient for clergy to reach by travel. The result is they are sometimes cancelled for lack of registrations--a sad waste of resources in view of the needs!

There is probably no single problem as urgent--for the whole movement of continuing education--as establishing stable links between producers and consumers. Better understanding of the motivation for continuing education--and barriers that block it--is a necessity![11]

A second observation of the current scene: I celebrate the people leading the continuing education movement! Creative men and women are working in this field. A number hold doctor's degrees in adult and continuing education, and others have achieved competence via informal learning. They have brought new insights and skills to bear on the problems of continuing education for ministry. They have developed imaginative programs and put together resources with fresh momentum.

Regrettably the budget pressures at every level have brought staff reductions and reassignments. SACEM must call church decision makers to help stabilize continuing education leadership at national and judicatory levels--both professional staff persons and those named as chairmen of judicatory committees to plan for continuing education in those areas. In one church 30% of the continuing education leaders at the regional level were changed within six months. A person needs at least several years to develop and begin to carry out a comprehensive plan of education for the clergy and lay leaders of the jurisdiction. Most of those now serving as regional board chairmen of continuing education are also fulltime in pastorates or similar occupations. Their regular work has first claim on their time and energies. Continuing education must have more than the left-overs after a leader's fulltime duties are met.

Third, some observations on budgets and funding. Though the percentage of Protestant clergy receiving money for continuing education, as part of their employment agreement, has risen from 22% to 28% in the past four years, the figure is still too low for anyone to applaud. Clergy support levels have not kept pace with the rising cost of living in the last twelve years.[12] The lower the minister's salary, the more urgent is the need for an allocated sum in the parish budget for the pastor's continuing education (if that is the prime source of funds).

Some denominations have been making substantial gains in continuing education funding. The United Church of Canada's provision ($250,000 in 1973 for about 2,500 clergy) represents a national church commitment to continuing education. The United Methodist Church's ministerial fund at the annual conference level produces the largest potential assistance of any Protestant body in America. The Lutheran Church in America and the Anglican Church of Canada have contributory arrangements by which a congregation and its clergy each contribute regularly to a fund that builds up to pay for clergy continuing education. The Episcopal Church at both national and diocesan levels has committed hundreds of thousands of dollars to clergy continuing education. Presbyterians widely require or strongly urge money and time allocations as presbyteries review ministers' terms of contract. Many Catholic dioceses ask every parish to provide annual sums for the continuing education of its priests. These are examples known to me.

In this time of inflation major increases in clergy participation in continuing education may depend upon the resourcefulness of leaders in the movement, collaborating with congregational and judicatory officials, to put together funding packages from multiple sources that will make possible most pastors' engagement in learning events year by year. Skills of negotiation coupled with patience are needed in developing these fiscal bases for continuing education programs.

Fourth, observe the research and development programs. Fifteen years ago research was almost non-existent (a notable exception: the Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., incorporated a research component from the start of its program in 1957). Now impressive research results can be noted. Lest the recent past be overlooked, I recall the work of the United Presbyterian Continuing Education Commission (1969)[13] and the Young Pastors Pilot Project of the United Methodist Church (1973).[14]

Probably the richest treasury of research data has been assayed by Robert Bonn in his analysis of the Clergy Support Study of 1974 (to be published by SACEM in October, 1975). Leaders in organizational development are offering new guidance for training clergy and laity in the parish context.[15] Experimental programs by state university extension services are showing new possibilities in statewide and regional programs of ecumenical continuing education.[16] Tie-ins between career development centers and continuing education programs are producing new understandings of the needs and motives of clergy.[17] A nationwide study of religion in America has yielded insights about the religious component in culture, with valuable implications for continuing education of clergy.[18]

In the budget crunch SACEM members should be alert to the prospect of reduced funds for research and development. Extra appreciation for the importance of research is needed if budget makers are to retain research items in tight budgets.

And SACEM should recognize the largely untapped research resource to be found in university masters and doctoral programs. Good students are often looking for good research projects in continuing education. SACEM's Committee on Research is in touch with some resources.

Fifth, I rejoice in the publications now enriching the continuing education movement. In my view the single most valuable item is Mark Rouch's book, Competent Ministry; a Guide to Effective Continuing Education.[19] With insight and clarity it provides a useful tool for clergy and laity in work together on continuing education.

Charles Stewart in Person and Profession considered continuing education as a component of career development in the ministry.[20]

Edgar W. Mills and Garry W. Hesser analyzed the 1969 Clergy Support Study in a SACEM publication, Continuing Education and Occupational Stress Among Protestant Clergy.[21]

Robert Bonn's analysis of the continuing education data in the 1974 Clergy Support Study will be published by SACEM in the early fall.[21a] For the first time definitive evidence will be available on nineteen denominations' clergy in regard to continuing education.

Periodicals have also been important. Christian Ministry issue of May 1974 was focused on "post-seminary growth," publishing articles by five SACEM members on aspects and elements of continuing education.[22] Center Letters produced monthly by the Center for Parish Development have consistently published valuable materials relating clergy to parish, with many implications for continuing education of pastors and laity.[23] The Journal of the Academy of Parish Clergy twice a year publishes articles by members and others, many of which contain suggestions about continuing education from the perspective of practitioners of ministry.[24]

As we congratulate authors and publishers who have served well we reflect on the need for more publication effort by SACEM members. Articles and books ought to be forthcoming from the creative people in the continuing education movement--the careful assessment of goals; description of processes and methods; and weighing of progress. We owe it to one another and to our profession to be diligent analysts and communicators of our own work, that others may learn thereby. SACEM Newsletter invites your articles.

My work on this talk has been frustrated by too many significant developments and too much material. Time allows me only to mention the promising ecumenical innovations in Montreal and Toronto and Hartford and Albany and Nashville and Madison--to name but six locales! And there is the burgeoning professional doctorate, open in many seminaries only to graduates with at least three years' experience in practice.[25] We should note the increased use of inductive and experiential learning methods, rather than reliance exclusively or even primarily on transmissive communication methods.[26] Of great importance to the future of continuing education are the programs in theological schools by which seminarians project ahead their own learning.[27] And so my list of interesting subjects approaches in length the forty topics among which you will be choosing for your inquiry this week!

As the third (and briefest) section of my talk I turn toward the future and share with you my expectations. Not all these trends are welcome, and not all are of equal importance. I present them for your consideration.

1. Parish clergy will continue to form influential committees on continuing education at the diocesan (synod, annual conference, etc.) level; and exercise increasing power in molding continuing education.

2. Parish clergy will continue to meet together as peer groups and colleagues for purposes that include learning from one another, mutual support, accountability, and fellowship.[28]

3. Guided study programs, produced by competent persons for use via mail, will continue to serve individuals and groups of pastors and laity, particularly those distant from theological libraries.[29]

4. Career counseling centers will become a regular part of clergy careers, especially at the points of entry (as a part of the admission process) and mid-career (in considering options at middle life). The latter point has special meaning for continuing education.[30]

5. A sizable number of parishes in mainline denominations will be served by part-time ("tent-making") clergy or students, often with emphasis on the "comfort" aspects of church life (worship and fellowship) rather than the "challenge" aspects (service and nurture).[31]

6. An increasing proportion of parish income formerly allocated for mission will go for local and nearby projects, with less for regional and national programs of the denomination.

7. Continuing education resident centers that depend heavily on (1) parish contributions either directly or via judicatories, or (2) large enrollments for all events, may expect increasing difficulty from inflated costs of food, housing, and services, possibly leading to decreased enrollments at high prices.

8. Continuing education time and money allotments will be available to an increasing number of parish clergy as contract provisions by employing congregations, thus enabling more options as to events and locations of continuing education to be elected by clergy.

9. Churches will be formed largely of people with privatized religion who associate voluntarily on the primary basis of private faith. Ministry--and continuing education for ministry--must deal realistically with this factor, not merely accepting it passively but rather learning skills of negotiating leadership in a voluntary association to effect changes that are acceptable to most members.

10. Fluctuating enrollments in colleges and universities will bring administrative initiatives to use their academic resources in serving the continuing education needs of clergy (among other groups of citizens).

11. Women and ethnic minority groups will press for changes in professional leadership in the churches, to open job opportunities for women in ministry and minority clergy. Such changes will have far-reaching effects at all levels of the churches, including leaders, purposes, and styles of continuing education for ministry.

12. With many and varied motives that push/pull toward continuing education, and formidable barriers (real and perceived) that block continuing education, the decision about participation will continue to rest with the individual clergy, who will resist manipulation and coercion but may value encouragement and enabling actions from many quarters.

May this ACEM gathering be a significant event in our lives as encouragers and enablers of continuing education!

Footnotes:

1. Connolly C. Gamble, Jr., The Continuing Theological Education of the American Minister: Report of a Survey. Richmond, Union Theological Seminary, 1960. 75 pp.

2. Reports were published from three of these consultations: Consultation on Continuing Education for the Ministry, Newton Centre, Mass., 1964. Proceedings, edited by Connolly C. Gamble, Jr. Richmond, 1964. 125 pp.

National Consultation on Continuing Education for the Ministry, University of Chicago, 1965. Proceedings, edited by Connolly C. Gamble, Jr. Richmond, 1965. 175 pp.

Adult Learning Seminar, Syracuse University, 1967. Proceedings, edited by Henry Babcock Adams. New York, Council Press, 1967. 99 pp.

3. Edward E. Thornton, Professional Education for Ministry; A History of Clinical Pastoral Education. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1970. 301 pp.

4. Reuel L. Howe, "The Continuing Education Needs of the Church's Ministry," pp. 67-83 of the 1964 Consultation Proceedings, supra note 2.

5. A Report on the Continuing Education Needs of Priests in the Diocese of Massachusetts, by Powell Associates, Inc., 46 Brattle St., Cambridge, MA 02138, 1971. 80 pp.

United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Temporary Commission on Continuing Education, Data from the Churchwide Research Conducted by the Temporary Commission on Continuing Education, 1969. 73 pp.

Milton J. Hagelberg, Continuing Education Needs of Clergymen in Michigan. Traverse City, Mich., Michigan State University, 1971. 20 pp.

Edgar W. Mills and Garry W. Hesser, Continuing Education and Occupational Stress Among Protestant Clergy. Richmond, SACEM, 1972. 54 pp.

Edgar W. Mills, Peer Groups and Professional Developments: Evaluation Report of the Young Pastors Pilot Project. Nashville, Division of the Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1973. 202 pp.

Genevieve Burch, Continuing Professional Education Interests of Clergy; Report of a Survey of Clergy in the Albany, N. Y. Area. Albany, Christians United in Mission, Inc., 1974. 70 pp. (available from Auburn Program, 3041 Broadway, New York, N. Y. 10027)

6. Thomas E. Brown, The S. R. D. Min. Plan Book; A Guide for Surveying Personal Resources and Planning Development in Ministry. Lancaster, Pa., Center for Professional Development in Ministry, 1975. loose-leaf notebook

John P. Fabian, Career Growth Inventory. Tacoma, WA, Pacific Lutheran University, 1973. 2 booklets, 7 pp. each. (one for clergy, one for raters)

James L. Lowery, Jr., compiler, Documentation Package on Personnel Performance Evaluation. Boston, Enablement, Inc., 1973. various paging.

Academy of Parish Clergy, Guide for Continuing Growth. Minneapolis, 1975. loose-leaf notebook.

7. Donald P. Smith, Clergy in the Cross Fire; Coping with Role Conflicts in the Ministry. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1973. 232 pp.

8. Douglas W. Johnson, Managing Change in the Church. New York, Friendship Press, 1974. 96 pp.

Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, Church Fights; Managing Conflict in the Local Church. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1973. 186 pp.

Lyle E. Schaller, The Change Agent; The Strategy of Innovative Leadership. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1972. 207 pp.

Robert C. Worley, Change in the Church: A Source of Hope. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1971. 127 pp.

9. Samuel W. Blizzard, "The Minister's Dilemma," Christian Century, April 25, 1956, pp. 508-9.

10. Mills and Hesser, op. cit., p. 36.

11. Mark A. Rouch, "Motivation for Continuing Education; Some Preliminary Considerations." Nashville, Division of the Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1974. 27 pp. mimeographed

James B. Dunning, "Priming the Prime Mover; Motivation for Continuing Education." Kenmore, WA, St. Thomas Seminary, 1975. 10 pp.

12. Hilbert J. Berger, Time to Negotiate; Guidelines to Follow When Salary Support Is Considered. New York, Friendship Press, 1973. 56 pp.

13. Supra, note 4.

14. Mark A. Rouch, Young Pastors; The Report of the Young Pastors Pilot Project. Nashville, Division of the Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1973. 32 pp.

15. Paul Dietterich and Donald Arthur, The District Superintendent, Key to District Revitalization. Naperville, Ill., Center for Parish Development, 1975. 113 pp.

16. James A. Sparks, "Helping Clergy Use Conflict Creatively." Madison, University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1975. 13 + 5 pp.

17. Supra, note 6.

18. John E. Biersdorf, Hunger for Experience; The Growing Edge of Religion in America. New York, Seabury Press, November 1975.

19. Mark A. Rouch, Competent Ministry; A Guide to Effective Continuing Education. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1974. 190 pp.

20. Charles William Stewart, Person and Profession; Career Development in the Ministry. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1974. 172 pp.

21. Supra, note 5.

21a. Robert L. Bonn, Continuing Education Participants. Richmond, SACEM, October 1975.

22. Christian Ministry (periodical), "Post-Seminary Growth," vol. 5, no. 3, May 1974. Chicago, Christian Century Foundation, 1974.

23. Center for Parish Development, The Center Letter (periodical).

24. Academy of Parish Clergy, Journal (periodical).

25. The 1974-75 Fact Book on Theological Education, published by the Association of Theological Schools, shows 3,176 enrolled in D.Min. programs in Fall 1974. 558 D.Min. degrees were awarded by ATS schools in 1974.

26. For use of the case method in ministry see Putting It Together in the Parish, by James D. Glasse, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1972. 159 pp.

27. See, for example, Ralph Macy's "Continuing Education Event for Seniors," Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, May 1975.

28. Duane Meyer has recorded four 60-minute tapes, "Local Group Support," with printed guides, available from Ministers Life Resources, Minneapolis.

29. Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, is among the seminaries now offering guided study courses. Eleven large public libraries are now publishing guides to study. Denver Public Library has launched a five-year, 70-unit project called Time Alive! Dallas Public Library has 32 guides for independent college-level stud . Salt Lake City, Tulsa, Atlanta, and Portland (Maine) are among those public libraries offering guides.

30. See relevant portions of Rouch, Competent Ministry, and Stewart, op. cit.

31. Enablement Information Service Newsletter covers developments in organizations of non-stipendiary ministers.